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In Passage of Jobs Measure, a Glimpse of Bipartisanship

By CARL HULSE

WASHINGTON — Five Republican senators broke ranks with their party on Monday to advance a \$15 billion job-creation measure put forward by Democrats, a rare bipartisan breakthrough after months in which Republicans had held together to a remarkable degree in an effort to thwart [President Obama's](#) agenda.

The [62-to-30 vote](#) — two more yeases than the minimum required to get past a procedural roadblock — cleared the way for the Senate to vote Wednesday to approve the measure, which Democrats said would create tens of thousands of new jobs at a time when the unemployment rate is hovering near double digits and is expected to remain high for years to come. But it is not clear whether the House, which has backed a broader approach, will go along without making substantial changes.

With the midterm elections already revving up and the parties facing deep ideological divides over a host of issues, there was no evidence that Monday's vote was the beginning of a trend. But after being repeatedly stymied by Republicans on a series of initiatives and nominations over the past months, Democrats were elated with the outcome and expressed gratitude to Republicans who sided with them in cutting off a potential [filibuster](#).

“Today, jobs triumphed over politics,” said Senator [Barbara Boxer](#), Democrat of California.

Senator [Scott Brown](#), the newly elected Republican from Massachusetts, was the first member of his party to cast his vote for the measure. He was followed by Senators [Susan Collins](#) and [Olympia J. Snowe](#) of Maine, George V. Voinovich of Ohio and [Christopher S. Bond](#) of Missouri, who voted after it became evident that Democrats would prevail. Senator Ben Nelson of Nebraska was the sole Democrat to vote no.

Mr. Brown, breaking with his party’s leadership on one of his first high-profile votes, said he backed the measure grudgingly, since even its sponsors acknowledged its limited scope.

“It is the first step in creating jobs, not only for the people of Massachusetts but for the people of the country,” said Mr. Brown, who said he intended to pursue other proposals, like an across-the-board cut in payroll taxes.

The bill was drafted by Senator [Harry Reid](#) of Nevada, the majority leader, and is built around an approach that has won bipartisan support in the past: a \$13 billion plan to give companies who hire unemployed Americans an exemption from paying payroll taxes on those workers through the end of this year. It also provides a \$1,000 tax credit to employers who keep new workers on the payroll for at least for 52 weeks.

Mr. Obama, who will be [meeting with Republicans](#) later this week on health care, praised the Senate action. Facing an erosion of support for Mr. Obama among independent voters who say they are not seeing the change that the president promised to bring to Washington, the White House has been looking for opportunities to show that the president can help transcend partisanship.

“The American people want to see Washington put aside partisan differences and make

progress on jobs, and today the Senate took one important step forward in doing that,” he said.

Republicans complained about the way the bill was handled and that they would be prohibited from offering amendments.

“Millions of Americans want to get back to work,” said Senator [Mitch McConnell](#) of Kentucky, the Republican leader. “That’s why Republicans will offer ideas that will make it easier for businesses to hire new workers. Those ideas should be considered, too.”

The outcome of the vote was in doubt throughout the day, and Democrats were prepared to accuse Republicans of simply trying to block any Democratic initiative, since many Republicans had backed the job provisions as part of a larger \$85 billion measure that also included billions of dollars in corporate tax breaks.

“Enough with the political games,” Senator [Jeff Merkley](#), Democrat of Oregon, said before the vote.

Democrats said they planned to call repeated votes on jobs legislation to force Republicans to explain to the public why they were balking at the measure when they supported the underlying provisions. But the decision by the five Republicans to help bring the bill to the floor short-circuited that argument, though Democratic political operatives immediately aimed criticism at Senate Republicans who supported the failed filibuster.

Like Mr. Brown, Ms. Snowe said she did not think the measure went far enough, and she also protested the Democratic decision to bar any Republican amendments. But the senator, who was particularly supportive of some business-oriented provisions in the measure, said those concerns were outweighed by the need to show Americans that Congress was acting.

“We have to demonstrate outside the Beltway and to Americans that we need to move forward

initiatives that are going to benefit small businesses and individuals in a tough economy,” Ms. Snowe said.

The vote prevented Mr. Reid from being second-guessed about his handling of the legislation. In a move that angered Republicans, the majority leader earlier this month jettisoned the broader \$85 billion measure, which had attracted bipartisan support.

He said he instead wanted to focus on core elements of the jobs package in an effort to move it more quickly and then follow up with other provisions on tax benefits and added jobless pay and health care coverage for the unemployed. But his maneuver raised the possibility that the effort could collapse; instead, Mr. Reid pulled out a victory.

“I hope this is a beginning of a new day here in the Senate,” Mr. Reid said after the vote.

He also promised to return with other jobs-related bills after the Senate disposed of the initial measure.

Besides the payroll tax exemption, the bill would also extend a tax break, included in last year’s [stimulus package](#), to encourage business to make capital expenditures. The provision would allow businesses to write off up to \$250,000 in capital investments in 2010 rather than depreciating the costs over time. It is projected to cost the government \$35 million over 10 years.

The Democrats’ measure would also reauthorize the highway trust fund, providing an extension of spending on road and transit programs through the end of the year, allowing billions of dollars in projects to move ahead. Democrats say public works construction is a quick and effective way to lift employment.

The bill would also allow state and local governments to issue Build America Bonds that provide a direct payment from the federal government for a part of the interest paid on bonds that finance government works projects.

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